

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting

Date: 31 January 2023
Time: 2.00pm – 3.15pm
Place: Fire HQ, Huntingdon
Present: Councillors: S Bywater, B Goodliffe (Chair), M Jamil (Vice Chair), E Murphy, D Over, K Reynolds, P Slatter and M Smith
Officers: Jon Anderson, Dawn Cave, Shahin Ismail, Stuart Smith, Chris Strickland, Deb Thompson and Matthew Warren
In attendance: Rachel Brittain and Wanda Khonjwayo (BDO)

There was a minute's silence for Scottish Fire and Rescue firefighter Barry Martin who had recently died after attending a fire in Edinburgh. The Chair said that the thoughts of CFRS were with the family and colleagues of Mr Martin at this sad time.

25. Apologies for absence and declarations of interest

Apologies were received from Councillor Atkins.

There were no declarations of interest.

26. Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee held 20th December 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th December 2022 were approved as a correct record.

27. Action Log

The Action Log was noted. All action were completed or in hand.

28. Draft Fire Authority Budget 2023-24

Members considered the draft Fire Authority Budget for 2023-24, the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2023-28, and the detailed medium term capital programme for 2023-27.

The Committee had been briefed at its meeting in December 2022 about the government announcement on how Fire Authority Council Tax levels could be increased. At that meeting, the Committee had agreed the forecast budget for 2023/24, to include public consultation on the maximum £4.95 Council Tax increase. The draft budget had also been shared with members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 19/01/23, where no changes were requested. The presentation of the Budget had changed significantly compared to previous years. The main increases related to pay, with budgeted increases of 5% for 2022-23 and 4% for 2023-24. These pay increases could be paid for by the Council Tax increases recommended. If that recommended increase was not realised, the Service would need to revisit its business continuity plans.

A Member observed that inflation was a major unknown, and asked what would be done with the contingency at the end of the year? Officers advised that there were still Reserves, which were sufficient, and all indications were that inflation would reduce. The Member commented that he had not felt that last year's budget was strong enough.

A Member queried the considerable increase in Consultant Fees, from £214,000 in 2022-23 to £414,000 in 2023-24. Officers advised that some of this related to specialist advice in relation to Property, especially around pre-application. The majority of the increase related to a specific technology, where skilled staff had left the in-house team and it was difficult to recruit as it was a niche market. As an alternative, resource was bought in as and when required.

A Member asked whether staff managers at all levels were reviewing costs continuously, particularly in terms of justifying new appointments to vacancies. Officers confirmed that this was the case.

The Committee received a Public Question from Mr Mark Harriss, a CFRS employee, in a private capacity. An officer observed that as FBU representative, it was difficult for Mr Harriss to speak independently on the issues raised:

On page 10 of the draft budget book 2023/2024 (Agenda item 4 Appendix), you write: "The pay award for operational staff is still yet to be determined but it has been assumed to be 5% for 2022/23 for the preparation of the 2023/24 budget." and "we have assumed pay increases of 4% going into 2023/24".

In November 2022, the 5% pay award was rejected and called an insult by firefighters, so much so, that in December a ballot for strike was launched with the result due on 30th/31st Jan.

We know that 2022 inflation hit over 11%. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), which advises the government on its economic plans, forecasts that CPI inflation will be 7.4% in 2023.

Aren't the figures you provide a little low? And have you forecasted for inflation matching (or beating) pay awards for both 2022 and 2023?

The Chair advised that a written response would be sent to Mr Harriss.

Action required: Deputy Chief Executive Officer (*response attached as Appendix 1*) Briefly, officers commented that the assumed pay rises were within the context of the overall funding package, and that the Fire Authority had to live within its means: the 5% and 4% respective annual pay increases represented what was achievable within the financial constraints detailed, and the recommendations set out. In addition, it was noted that government was warning against higher pay awards which could lead to pay inflation.

It was resolved unanimously to:

1. review the budget book attached at Appendix 1 and endorse the recommendations detailed on Page 17 within it:
 - (i) that approval is given to a Fire Authority budget (as detailed in Appendix 1) to the requirement of £33,678,280;
 - (ii) that approval is given to a recommended Fire Authority precept for Tax from District Authorities and Peterborough City Authority of £24,134,451;
 - (iii) That approval be given to an Authority Tax for each band of property, based on the number of Band D equivalent properties notified to the Fire Authority by the District Authorities and Peterborough City Authority (302,095):

Band	2022/23	Authority Tax	2023/24	Band	2022/23	Authority Tax	2023/24
A	£49.98	+£3.30	£53.28	E	£91.63	+£6.05	£97.68
B	£58.31	+£3.85	£62.16	F	£108.29	+£7.15	£115.44
C	£66.64	+£4.40	£71.04	G	£124.95	+£8.25	£133.20
D	£74.97	+£4.95	£79.92	H	£149.94	+£9.90	£159.84

- (iv) That approval is given to the Capital Programme detailed in Appendix 2.

29. Annual External Audit Report

The Committee considered the Annual External Audit Report. Members noted that this late report had been accepted by the Chair for the following reasons for urgency and lateness:

Reason for lateness - finalisation of comments

Reason for urgency – Policy and Resources is the most appropriate Committee to consider the Value For Money report and finalisation of the audit work which has already had significant delay.

Rachel Brittain of BDO introduced her BDO colleague Wanda Khonjwayo, who would be working with the Authority, going forward. She thanked Members for their patience, as this report had been outstanding for some time. The report summarised the key issues arising from BDO's audit of the Fire Authority for the year ended 31/03/2021, and an unqualified opinion of the Authority's financial statements on 14/02/2022 had been issued.

It was noted that the External Auditors were now required to review and report on the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, and report on any significant weaknesses in those arrangements. No such weaknesses had been identified, and the report was very positive. The External Auditor advised that the Authority needed to continue to robustly monitor the impact of inflation on its funding position.

In response to a Member question, it was confirmed that there were a number of minor recommendations arising from the Audit, which were set out on the penultimate page of the report. It was also noted that the Auditor's Annual Report would be published on the Fire Authority's website. Action required: Scrutiny and Assurance Manager.

It was resolved unanimously to approve the Audit Completion Report.

30. Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2022-23, including a mid-year Treasury Management Update

Members considered an update on revenue and capital spending as of 31 December 2022.

There had been no significant changes since the Monitoring Report had been presented to the December Committee meeting. Many of the budget lines were showing underspends, as the full impact of inflationary increases had

not yet been incurred. It was confirmed that there was no government support for energy costs.

The operational fire budget related to On-Call firefighter expenditure, which fluctuated according to demand. The budget was significantly overspent due to the high levels of operational activity over the summer months. The Home Office had indicated that it may grant funding to cover the financial impact of such spare conditions. It was confirmed that the spare funding, if forthcoming, should be received by the end of the current financial year.

In terms of the Treasury Management review, there had been no major changes, other than cash reserves reducing significantly due to property projects. Many public bodies were opting to no longer invest in banks domiciled in countries with questionable ethical standards, and therefore it was likely that those investments would be reviewed and reinvested in UK based institutions, when they matured in the coming months.

It was resolved unanimously to:

note the position on revenue and capital spending and the mid-year treasury management update attached at Appendix 2.

31. Fire Authority Programme Management – Monitoring Report

Members considered an update against the 2022/23 projects.

The Committee noted issues around the ongoing delays with the Replacement ICCS and Mobilising Solution, where extended timescales for some planned work could cause issues for meeting overall timescales. A decision would be made in early April on when to go live with the new system, which may be after the summer. The likely process, including moving the Control Room to St Ives temporarily whilst the new technology was installed at Service Headquarters, were noted.

With regard to the Review of Operations project (P137), the focus was moving from business continuity to the flexibility and efficiency side of project. This project would mean the Service was well placed to deal with the next HMICFRS Inspection round on productivity and efficiency. The Strategic Brief template for the Inspection had changed four times over the last month, and the advantages of being early in the Inspection process were noted. It was also noted that this should also meet the government's requirement for Fire Authorities to provide an efficiency statement plan to the Minister to justify a decision to increase the precept by £4.95.

It was resolved unanimously to note the programme status report, as of December 2022, attached at Appendix 1.

32. Strategic Risk and Opportunity Management Register

The Committee considered an updated strategic risk report, as of January 2023, highlighting those risks that were considered above the risk appetite of the Authority.

Members noted that the report had been accepted by the Chair for the following reasons for urgency and lateness:

Reasons for Lateness – capacity to complete the report has been impacted by the HMICFRS inspection.

Reasons for Urgency – the Risk review to Policy and Resources is overdue.

Cyber-attacks remained one of the highest risks posed to the Service, and work continued to keep systems protected as new threats came forward, including educating staff on the emerging threats.

There were a number of risks related to fire from electric vehicle battery and large battery energy storage sites, especially as there was a lack of UK guidance and legislation around these issues. Members discussed these issues, noting that proprietors of EV and battery storage facilities should be undertaking their own risk assessments. The key issues were how the risks with electrical batteries were mitigated, and the issue of capacity to deal with these issues. The recent issue of JustEat scooters in Cambridge was noted. The main problem was that the legislation had not yet caught up with the technology. Until that point, a pragmatic approach was being taken, in discussion with partners and governmental departments.

An error was noted on the presentation of Risk Number STA-R221 in the report.

There was a discussion on the increase in solar panel battery storage being housed in attics in domestic properties, which often also housed combustible materials. There was also a question about the proliferation of log burners. Officers commented that log burners were more easily dealt with, whereas battery fires were harder to deal with as the thermal runaway process meant that such fires did not need oxygen. The Fire Service does not have any jurisdiction on domestic properties, so was reliant on appropriate legislation coming forward. A Member suggested greater public awareness and education may be required.

A Member suggested that evidence of attendance at an increasing number of battery fires could be used to put pressure on MPs and government departments. It was confirmed that information on battery fires had to be extracted manually, but it was agreed that this could feed into the community safety messaging. Action required.

A Member suggested that the Fire Service could consider input into the training of apprentices and new workers in emerging green technologies.

It was resolved unanimously to review and note the Strategic Risk report.

34. Estate projects – update

Members received an update on current and proposed estates projects.

It was noted that a full report on the new Huntingdon Fire Station and Training Centre would be considered at the Fire Authority meeting on 10th February. Pre-applications discussions with Huntingdonshire District Council were still ongoing regarding the current site. A positive decision was expected, but it was taking longer than anticipated, due to the site being in both a flood risk area and in a Conservation area.

Cambridgeshire Constabulary had decided not to proceed with the St Neots co-located site, following the procurement process.

Members noted the issues around the last remaining domestic property owned by CFRS, at Upherd Lane in Ely, which is part of the legacy from when Fire Services, like Police Forces, had a considerable portfolio of domestic properties for operational personnel. In response to a Member question, it was confirmed that CFRS was unlikely to offer to sell the property to the District Council, as it had a duty to maximise the return for the property. A Member asked if there was any value in retaining the Ely property, for cashflow/Reserves purposes, so that the return was not realised this year. Officers advised that they were keen to divest of the property as soon as possible, given that it was unoccupied, and the cost burden it incurred.

There was a discussion about joint working with Cambridgeshire Constabulary on co-located sites, given the amount of work that had been put into potential projects at Dogsthorpe, Monkswood, Wisbech and now St Neots, only for Cambridgeshire Constabulary to withdraw. A Member suggested that whilst opportunities were limited going forward, an earlier and more detailed assessment on the viability of projects may be worthwhile, so that work was not wasted on aborted projects. Officers agreed that this was a source of frustration, and there was a need to learn to “fail early” and put clear timescales on such projects. Often there was initial enthusiasm but this could

dissipate following personnel changes. A Member observed that several years ago, there had been considerable political pressure from government for Blue Light services to work together on projects to save money, but there was now less pressure.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) approve the sale of Upherds Lane in Ely;
- b) note the update on other estate projects.

35. Fire and Indemnity Company (FRIC) Update

Members received an update on the insurance and protection arrangements provided by the Fire and Rescue Indemnity Company (FRIC).

The Committee was reminded that FRIC was a Mutual company limited by guarantee, owned and controlled by its twelve Members, with CFRS being one of the original five founder members. The company has been very successful, and one of the key benefits was that CFRS's insurance costs had been minimised in a market where costs had been increasing rapidly, with contribution rising by only 2% in 2022/23, mainly as a result of the reduction in fleet size.

A Member observed that the discounts available to CFRS resulted from the Authority having been proactive in a number of innovative areas such as CCTV in vehicles, Health & Safety and training.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- note the contents of this report and in particular, the ongoing benefits of FRIC membership.

36. Work Programme

Members noted the forward Work Programme.

Appendix 1

Mr M Harriss

VIA EMAIL

8 February 2023

Dear Mr Harriss,

At the Policy and Resources Committee on 31 January 2023 the Chair of that Committee permitted the asking of a late question on agenda item 4 (Draft Fire Authority Budget 2023/24) that had been sent by you as a 'private individual'. The question was;

On page 10 of the draft budget book 2023/2024 (Agenda item 4 Appendix), you write: "The pay award for operational staff is still yet to be determined but it has been assumed to be 5% for 2022/23 for the preparation of the 2023/24 budget." and "we have assumed pay increases of 4% going into 2023/24".

In November 2022, the 5% pay award was rejected and called an insult by firefighters, so much so, that in December a ballot for strike was launched with the result due on 30th/31st Jan.

We know that 2022 inflation hit over 11%. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), which advises the government on its economic plans, forecasts that CPI inflation will be 7.4% in 2023.

Aren't the figures you provide a little low? And have you forecasted for inflation matching (or beating) pay awards for both 2022 and 2023?

I answered the question in my capacity as presenting Officer of the agenda item and Treasurer to the Authority. As you were unable to attend the meeting in person, in accordance with current Standing Orders as to Meetings, my written response is;

The Fire Authority has a duty to set a balanced budget. This service must consider costs against available funding. The proposed budget provides for cost of living pay awards of 5% and 4%, that are affordable within the current funding envelope. If the negotiations regarding pay do create a pressure above that allowed for in the budget, then the Authority will require the Service to identify measures to identify savings that will fund the additional budget.

I would also add that the Monitoring Officer has advised that in future, given that you are the Fire Brigades Union representative, questions from you will only be permitted in your official capacity to properly distinguish such questions from those asked by members of the public.

Your sincerely,

Matthew Warren
Deputy Chief Executive Officer

Cc Policy and Resources Committee Members

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting

Date: 26th April 2023

Time: 2.00pm – 3.08pm

Place: Fire HQ, Huntingdon

Present: Councillors: S Bywater, B Goodliffe (Chair), M Jamil (Vice Chair), D Dew, E Murphy, D Over, K Reynolds, P Slatter and M Smith

Officers: Jon Anderson, Shahin Ismail, Tamar Oviatt-Ham, Stuart Smith, Chris Strickland, Deb Thompson and Matthew Warren

37. Apologies for absence and declarations of interest

No apologies received or declarations of interest made.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Doug Dew to the Committee and thanked Councillor Michael Atkin for his time as a member of the Committee.

38. Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee held 31st January 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 31st January 2023 were approved as a correct record.

39. Action Log

The action log was noted. All actions were completed or in hand.

40. Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report

Members considered an update on revenue and capital spending as of 31 March 2023.

Members noted:

- The report was still subject to year-end changes and a full update would be given, including any carry overs, in the report to Committee in June.

- The impact of pay award was highlighted in appendix 1 of the report and showed an overspend of 2%. This followed through to the control and local government staffing but not through to professional staffing as there had been a significant turnover in this area over the last year.

Arising from the report:

- A member queried why the rent and rates line was showing as red. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer explained that this was largely due to business rates and officers were currently reviewing where rates were being paid.

It was resolved unanimously to note the position on revenue and capital spending.

41. Commercial and Procurement Activity – Annual Update

The Committee considered an update on the commercial activity of the organisation for the financial year 2022/23 (including exemptions), the key priorities for 2023/24 and an overview of changes to public procurement.

Members noted:

- Three category leads had been established, leading on specific elements of the service and this had created greater resilience within the team.
- A pipeline approach was used as best practice, and this allowed officers to establish, in good time, when contracts were coming to an end. Members noted that the PPE contract was coming to an end and that there would be an extensive piece of work carried out in relation to the retendering process.
- A new procurement act was being introduced by Government and there would be a focus around sustainability.
- The exemption process was only used in exceptional circumstances.

Arising from the report:

- A member queried if the waivers could be published on the Fire Authority Website. Officers stated that they could append the list of waivers to the regular report and that they could also publish them on the website. **ACTION**

- A member questioned whether there was a cost limit in relation to waivers. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer stated that waivers could be approved by the Chair of the Fire Authority on amounts over £50,000 and there was no limit. He clarified however that there were very strict criteria in relation to whether a waiver could be taken and that they would not be taken if the reasons were avoidable.
- A member sought clarity on any supply chain issues the authority were experiencing or would experience going forwards. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer explained that there would be challenges going forwards in relation to the supply of PPE in particular the BA set valves and lease cars. He explained that officers had established good lead in times to account for these difficulties. The Head of Commercial and Business Support explained that there was a risk register for the procurement of all contracts and that any issues were raised at regular contract review meetings. The Chief Fire Officer highlighted that the procurement team had significant influence on the National Fire Authority Council in relation to procurement and had been involved in work at a national level in relation to the training framework, pre-hospital emergency medicine, the apprenticeship framework and contingent labour.

It was resolved unanimously to note the contents of this report.

42. Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2024-29

Members considered an update on the creation of the Service's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) for 2024/29 and seek approval for our CRMP creation plans.

Members noted:

- The risk management plan was reviewed every 3-5 years. Officers were currently going through the process of collecting and analysing data.
- The report outline the timescales of the review and consultation process on the risk management plan.
- Consultation on the plan would be carried out through community forums and then the plan would be brought back to committee for approval in November 2023. The diagram at 9.4 of the report outlined the consultation timescales. Officers stated there was a possibility

there might be a delay in bringing the plan to Committee for approval due to the tight timescales for consultation.

- The plan was due to go live on 1 April 2024.
- The Chief Fire Officer stated that His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) had given positive feedback on the process in the inspection report for 2021-22.

Arising from the report:

- A member sought further information on the consultation process in relation to the community engagement forums. The reporting officer explained that there were over 200 people on the fire authorities social media network and that the service had established connections through partner organisations with hard to reach groups. The reporting officer stated that they also used the nextdoor app as well as facebook and tiktok to engage with individuals.
- A member queried whether officers had an idea of the number of responses they would receive through the consultation process. The reporting officer explained that through the first round of engagement in May-July through social media etc they expected to receive a good response rate. The reporting officer stated that through the second round when the formal consultation took place in November - January they generally receive around 30-40 formal responses.
- The Chair queried whether any engagement was carried out through the library service and a member also commented that members of the fire authority should be engaged to help increase engagement with the consultation. The reporting officer explained that they would contact members of the fire authority to see how they could support the engagement process. **ACTION**
- A member queried if there was any overlap with engagement on flood risk and rescue that could be utilised to help further engagement. The reporting officer explained that they worked closely with the Districts and County Council in this area and that as part of the safe and well visits that the fire authority carry out they discuss flood risk with individuals. They also work closely with the Environment Agency.

It was resolved unanimously to:

1. note the contents of this report and make comment as they deem appropriate;
2. approve the approach to Community Risk Management Plan creation.

43. Efficiency Plan 2023-24

Members considered an overview of the Efficiency Plan for 2023/24.

Members noted:

- The service had worked hard over the last few years to prepare for potential financial challenges including extensive financial business continuity planning. The
- Government had provided fire and rescue authorities with the ability to increase its Band council tax by £5 and the increase in Cambridgeshire meant that, whilst efficiencies had been identified further cuts had been avoided.

It was resolved unanimously to note the plan and the compliance action, taken on behalf of the Authority, by the Service.

44. Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service Unwanted Fire Signals (UFS) Strategy

The Committee considered an update on update the Policy and Resources Committee on the strategy to reduce the burden of unwanted fire signals (UFS), and the Service's reporting of automatic fire alarms (AFA's) to His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

Members noted:

- A policy was already in place for non-attendance of AFAs during the period of 09:00 and 17:00 hours, Monday to Friday, for some none domestic premises (namely shops and offices) and this change had been made historically based on data and to improve efficiency and effectiveness when delivering services to the public.

- As part of the Operational Response Review project data had been reviewed to understand what capacity any additional policy change would create.
- It was intended to extend the AFA non-attendance policy between the hours of 09:00 – 17:00 Monday to Friday for the following additional premises:
 - Hospitals and hospices
 - Houses of multiple occupancy
 - Prisons and secure accommodation
 - Hostels
 - High rise buildings
- Officers had been consulting extensively with all of the bodies potentially affected by the change.

Arising from the report:

- A member sought further clarity in relation to vulnerable adults in high rise buildings and whether AFAs would be attended in such cases. The reporting officer explained that individual flats with AFA in high rise buildings would be treated as private residential properties so would be attended. If an AFA was activated in a communal area during the proposed times then this would be subject to the double knock system.
- A member commented that the additional premises added to the policy were public organisations and queried how regularly their fire procedures were checked. The reporting officer explained that there was a risk based inspection programme in place and public organisations were inspected on a regular basis and should they have a particular issue then the service would reserve the right to attend the premises.
- A member queried if schools were attended automatically. The reporting officer stated that education settings had not been attended automatically for a number of years.
- A member expressed their concern regarding the communications associated with the change in policy and how this would be publicised as the policy could be easily misinterpreted. The reporting officer explained that it was the onus of the responsible person at each premises to ensure fire procedures were in place and followed.

Officers had spoken to all responsible persons in relation to the change in policy and were supporting them.

- A member asked for more detail to be included in the communication of the changes in policy to ensure that it was clear to the general public why the changes were being made and plans in place to mitigate any risks. The reporting officer clarified that a detailed communications plan had been developed and agreed to share this with members.

ACTION

It was resolved unanimously to:

1. note the content of this report and in particular the risk assessment,
2. endorse the policy change detailed at Paragraph 8 of the report.

45. Work Programme

Members noted the forward Work Programme.

46. Overview & Scrutiny Committee minutes for 19th January 2023

Members note the Overview & Scrutiny Committee minutes of 19th January 2023.

47. Exclusion of Press & Public

It was resolved unanimously that the press and public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the agenda contains exempt information under Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and that it would not be in the public interest for this information to be disclosed information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

49. Site of the former Huntingdon Fire Station

The Committee received an update on progress with the sale of the old Huntingdon Fire Station site.

It was resolved unanimously to note the current position.